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News Release

For Immediate Release

Stream testing begins for swimming season

During the summer months, Ozarks residents spend more time in local recreational waters such as streams and rivers. However, water in these swimming areas can contain harmful bacteria and parasites from human or animal waste and wastewater runoff. When a person swallows contaminated water they may become sick.

In order to provide swimmers with information on the quality of water in local swimming holes, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department partners with the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks to monitor select stream and river locations in Greene County for the presence of E. coli and coliform bacteria. The E. coli count is an indication of fecal water contamination.

Samples are collected from five area swimming locations weekly by the Watershed Committee, and tested by the health department lab staff. Sites are selected based on their accessibility and the likelihood that people might come in contact with the water. They are located on the James River, Galloway Creek, Lake Springfield, Little Sac River and Wilson's Creek. The health department does not regulate these sites in any way, and these samples are not required to be collected under any state or federal rules. The information is provided as a community service.

Testing typically runs from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The current results can be found on the health department's website at: <http://health.springfieldmo.gov/streams>. It is worth noting that this week's initial test results are high in E. coli. This is likely because the samples were taken Tuesday, shortly after heavy rains on Monday. This is not unusual, as bacterial levels are often high in stormwater runoff.

The most common recreational water illness is diarrhea, which is caused by swallowing water contaminated by E. coli, Shigella, Giardia or Cryptosporidium. To help protect your family from recreational water illnesses, follow these healthy swimming tips:

- Do not swim after heavy rains, or if the water is murky. Bacterial levels are often high in stormwater runoff.
- Do not swim when you have diarrhea. You may spread bacteria and make other people sick.
- Do not swallow swimming water; and if possible avoid getting it in your mouth altogether.
- Practice good hygiene. Bacteria from your hands could end up on your food.
- When water is contaminated or conditions are uncertain, avoid full-body contact water activities such as swimming and diving.

For more information, contact: Stacey Armstrong or Mike Kromrey with the Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, (417) 866-1127; or Mike Brothers, Public Information Administrator, Springfield-Greene County Health Department.